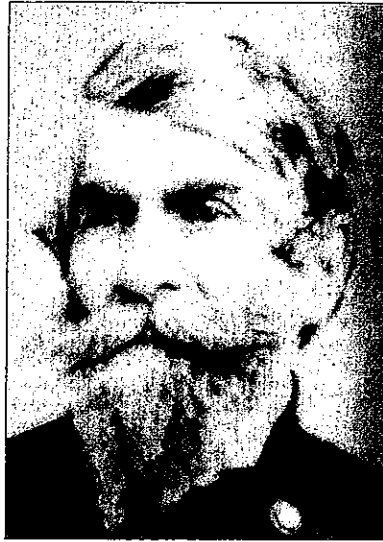


THIRD BRIGADE

(1,424 MEN)

BRIGADIER GENERAL GEORGE SEARS GREENE



"Old Man Greene," his soldiers called him, or sometimes, "Old Pop"—at sixty-two, George Green was the oldest general in the army, though he was far from doddering or ineffectual. He was a hardy warhorse, a man who spent most of his time in the saddle, an officer who insisted on hard drilling and discipline in camp and hard fighting on the battlefield. Harsh in his manner, Greene was not a man who won immediate affection; but those under his command soon learned to appreciate his ability. He was a colorful figure, with a full head of silver hair, a huge mustache, a large grizzled spade-like beard, and an easy-going style of dress that made him look more like a farmer than the Old Army regular he was.

To the New Yorkers of his brigade, most of who were under twenty-one, the old man seemed an ancient out of the Revolution or the War of 1812. In fact (though he was a relative of Revolutionary War hero Nathaniel Greene), he was a native of Warwick, Rhode Island, the son of a shipowner who was financially ruined by the War of

1812. It had been intended that young George would enter Brown University, Rhode Island's famous institution of higher learning, but his father's sudden plunge into poverty made this impossible. Instead Greene went to work in New York City. He received an appointment to West Point, and graduated 2nd in his class of 35 cadets in 1823, six years before Robert E. Lee. He was posted to the artillery and for thirteen years interspersed teaching engineering at the Academy with dull garrison duty in New England. Restless, he left the army to enter civil engineering, and for the next quarter century built railroads and designed municipal sewage and water systems for Washington, Detroit, and several other cities. The Central Park reservoir in New York City was his handiwork, along with the enlarged High Bridge over the Harlem River.

Greene didn't re-enter the army immediately following Fort Sumter, as did most West Pointers. He waited until January 1862, quitting work on the Croton Reservoir in Central Park to take command of the 60th New York Volunteers, men from New York State's "North Country" along the St. Lawrence River. In April 1862 he was promoted to brigadier general and in May was given command of his brigade. His first duty was in the Shenandoah Valley Campaign, but Greene and his men did not fight there. His first action was at Cedar Mountain in August 1862, where he succeeded to the command of the division after Brig. Gen. Christopher Augur was wounded and Augur's first replacement, Brig. Gen. Henry Prince, was captured. Both Augur and Army of Virginia leader Maj. Gen. John Pope praised him after the battle.

Greene led the division through the August battle at Second Bull Run, where it was only lightly engaged. At Antietam in September, he pushed his brigades forward in what would be the strongest penetration of the enemy left flank to occur on that bloody autumn day. He was not properly supported in his exposed position, however, and was forced to retreat after hard fighting and heavy casualties. In October, command of the division was transferred to

Brig. Gen. John Geary, who had returned to the army after being wounded at Cedar Mountain. Geary outranked Greene, (Geary's appointment to brigadier general pre-dated Greene's by three days), and "Old Man Greene" went back to leading his brigade, which was reorganized in April 1863 so as to be composed entirely of New York regiments. At Chancellorsville, Greene again assumed division command in the middle of heavy fighting after Geary was knocked unconscious by a near hit from a cannonball. Greene's brigade of New Yorkers, meanwhile, fought well, but assaulted from two directions, lost a terrific 528 men before falling back.

By the summer of 1863, "Old Pop" Greene was a seasoned veteran with enough battle experience at or above brigade level to allow his superiors to feel comfortable in his abilities. He had been in command of his brigade for more than a year, since the Shenandoah Campaign.

GETTYSBURG: Greene and his New Yorkers arrived with the rest of Geary's division by the Baltimore Pike shortly after 5:00 in the afternoon of July 1. He was directed to the army's left, and his men bivouacked that evening on or near Little Round Top. His brigade was moved to Culp's Hill the next morning, where Greene's substantial engineering skills proved invaluable to the army when he convinced Geary to permit the men to construct defensive field works to strengthen their positions along the crest. As a result, his men dug in near the crest on upper Culp's Hill to the right of a battered First Corps division led by James Wadsworth. Greene's line faced almost due east. His New York regiments were aligned, from left to right, as follows: 78th, 60th, 102nd, 149th, and 137th. With Thomas Kane's Bucktail's on his own right and Charles Candy's regiments in reserve, Greene felt reasonably confident about the strength of his position.

The sound of the battle began about 4:00 p.m., when the Confederates struck the left flank of the Union army, and was plainly heard by Greene's men on Culp's Hill. About 7:00 p.m., Greene's men watched

with something approaching dismay as the other two brigades of the Second Division were pulled off the hill and marched after Brig. Gen. Alpheus Williams' First Division, which was headed to reinforce the embattled flank. Worried about his exposed flanks, Greene extended his right flank by placing the 137th New York on the top of the lower portion of Culp's Hill, almost perpendicular to his main front. It was an incredible blunder by higher-ups: Greene's brigade was left alone to defend Culp's Hill.

His preparations proved crucial when he was attacked in the growing darkness by Maj. Gen. Edward Johnson's Division across his entire front. Confederates from Maryland Steuart's Brigade took over a line of recently abandoned trenches on the lower hill and turned and enfiladed the 137th New York, which was driven back some distance up the hill. Greene's men, sheltered behind their breastworks, were able to hang on to most of their embattled line against a hillside full of surging Confederates. His tenacious defense saved Culp's Hill—the key to the army's right—and turned back a serious threat to the entire Union position at Gettysburg. Twelfth Corps commander Maj. Gen. Henry Slocum attributed "the failure of the enemy to gain possession of our works . . . entirely to the skill of General Greene and the heroic valor of his troops."

When the rest of Geary's division returned after dark that night, they found the enemy in possession of much of their lines, and thus filed into new positions adjacent to the right of Greene's weary defenders, extending the line to near the Baltimore Pike. At daybreak, around 4:00 a.m. on July 3, the fighting for the hill resumed, with Greene's men still on the crest where the bullets flew the thickest. Johnson's Confederates launched another series of attacks and again Greene's New Yorkers, with assistance from Candy's Ohioans and Pennsylvanians, grimly held on to the wooded and rocky crest. By 11:00 that morning, Johnson's battered Confederates brigades had been pushed out of the lines they had captured the night before

and off the hill, and the Union army's right flank was safe. George Greene's men had done the lion's share of the fighting by the Twelfth Corps on July 2 and 3. Consequently, they suffered 303 casualties—more than any other brigade in the corps.

After his distinguished performance in a crisis at Gettysburg, Greene continued in command of his brigade until he was severely wounded in the face at the Battle of Wauhatchie near Chattanooga on October 29, 1863.

Greene resumed his career as a civil engineer after the war, and was the president of the American Society of Civil Engineers. He died in 1899 at the age of 98.

For further reading:

Pfanz, Harry W. *Gettysburg: Culp's Hill and Cemetery Hill*. Chapel Hill. 1993.

Greene, George Sears. "The Breastworks at Culp's Hill." in Johnson and Buel, eds. *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, 4 vols. (vol. 3). New York, 1884-7.

Motts, Wayne E. "To Gain a Second Star: The Forgotten George S. Greene." *Gettysburg Magazine*, #3, July, 1990.

Pfanz, Harry W. *Gettysburg: Culp's Hill and Cemetery Hill*. Chapel Hill. 1993.
